SHIN'ICHI HISAMATSU

Mondō[1]: *At the Death of a "Great-Death-Man"*

It was my most revered teacher, Dr. Kitaro Nishida, who in 1920 first introduced me to Dr. Daisetz Suzuki. Ever since that time, for a period of some forty-five years, I have received Dr. Suzuki's many kindnesses in the Dharma. I thus have not only respected Dr. Suzuki as my "Uncle-Teacher in Dharma" but have also felt personally very close to him. Then, early on the morning of July 12, 1966, he suddenly passed into nirvana after suffering severe abdominal pain from a strangulation of the intestines.

Looking back upon his life, I cannot help but feel the deepest reverence for him. Because of my own illness, I regretfully could not attend his funeral. I sent instead the following telegraph of condolence: *Billions of kalpas apart; [yet] not a moment separated.* Seven weeks later, after the customary mourning period, we of the F.A.S. Zen Institute held on September 4, 1966, midday of the fall intensive *sesshin* period, a solemn memorial service for Dr. Suzuki, at Reiun-in, Myoshinji Temple.

On this occasion, I suddenly gave out a cry and held a last *mondō* with Dr. Suzuki. This *mondō* and the memorial discourse which was presented after it now follow:

Ohhhhhhhhh . . .!
This *ONE* who hurts!
Are you suffering?
It's all right,
Thank you!

Dr. Suzuki, throughout his lifetime of nearly one century,

[1] A Zen question-and-answer exchange.

consistently concentrated on the study of Zen in a unique way. For him, study and practice were one and the same. He also sought, through his proficient command of English, to promote the spread of Zen abroad. Thus did he enable Zen, which had been unique to the Orient, to be known all over the world and, more than that, to nurture man's spiritual life and thereby to contribute to mankind profoundly and widely. This is truly an immense joy for the Dharma.

About ten years ago, when I went abroad, visiting various areas, including the United States, Europe, Egypt, the Near East, the Middle East, and India, I was surprised to find that wherever I went the celebrated name of Dr. Suzuki was known as that of a sage of the East and that Zen was known in an inseparable connection with his name.

It is unavoidable that in the mode and degree of people's knowledge about him there are differences between the deep and the shallow, the right and the wrong, the approving and the critical. Nevertheless, the reputation of a person like Dr. Suzuki, who is universally known for his unique religious and cultural contribution, not only is unprecedented in Japan but is rare in the whole world. It may not be overstating the matter to say that he was one of the greatest treasures of the world as well as a national asset to Japan. No wonder the unexpected report of his death saddened people at home and abroad, causing them to mourn for him.

Confronted with his passing, how can we properly comprehend the so-called death of this man-of-the-universe? Even when we contemplate death in its ordinary sense—the death of ourselves or of others—we find, if we reflect deeply, that it is far from easy to know how to respond to it. Much more difficult is it, therefore, to know how to grasp the kind of death which an ordinary understanding of death does not exhaust, as in the case of Dr. Suzuki's death. Upon his dying, a great many people are reported to have made calls of condolence and to have been present at the funeral. But I wonder how they took the death of this man beyond life-and-death—the death of Dr. Suzuki as a "Great-Death-Man." I believe this is a matter of deep concern to us all.

Until now, Zen, as is well known, has taken up the problem of

"life-and-death" not as a mere object of speculation but as the most crucial, total concern of the living-dying subject himself. Not only in Zen but also in Buddhism in general, the problem of life-and-death has been considered to be the primary problem. Death does not exist apart from life; life is not separate from death. Life is attended by death; death accompanies life. Thus death alone is not the absolute crisis; life also is a crisis. Hence we have in Buddhism such expressions as *Shōji jidai*, "The Great-Matter of life-and-death," or *Shōji no ichi daiji*, "The single most important matter—life-and-death." As to the term "life-death" (or life-and-death), it is quite a problem what implication it carries. It carries in it more than its literal meaning. It can possibly include—the whole of humankind, or indeed, the whole world. Otherwise we could not say, "The Great-Matter of life-and-death."

The problem of life-and-death cannot be said to be of a crucial or absolute nature if it implies anything partial, such as something physiological or psychological, or if it implies anything particular which is distinguished in terms of right-and-wrong, good-and-evil, likes-and-dislikes and so on. Here we see the reason why a thorough existential inquiry into the implication of the term "life-and-death" is necessary. Such an existential inquiry into the meaning of the term is exactly the same as an existential inquiry into the matter of life-and-death itself. The problem here, therefore, is not a particular or individual problem; nor is it a problem which, even when it does include everything, can be treated in a merely objective manner. It is really the crucial problem of existential subjectivity. Its solution will, therefore, mean at the same time the ultimate solution of the whole problem of man. As regards Dr. Suzuki's death, any ordinary way of encountering it is quite unsatisfactory when we think of him as one who has expounded the life-death problem to the world.

I think some of us may have heard that Śākyamuni, when he was entering into *nirvāna*, said to his disciples assembled round him: "If anyone among you should say that I am now entering into *nirvāna*, he will not be my disciple. Nor will he be my disciple who should say that I am not entering *nirvāna*." According to Śākyamuni,

either affirming or negating his entrance into *nirvāna* makes one fail to be his disciple. Zen early took this up as a *kōan*.[1] How should we, as well as Śakyamuni's disciples, meet this situation right at this moment? If ordinary people had heard Śākyamuni say the above on his entering into *nirvāna* at his death, many of them might have been puzzled and might have grumbled the common place grievance: "We don't understand those ambiguous words of yours; they are beyond our apprehension." But how should a disciple of Śākyamuni cope with the Buddha's death so that he may be a true disciple? This is a very important matter.

In the ninth century China, there lived a famous Zen master, Hsiang-yên Chin-hsien,[2] who said: "If on the way you meet an accomplished man, greet him with neither speech nor silence." Hsiang-yên meant that in meeting a person who has attained Awakening or *Nirvāna*, neither speech nor silence will do. How, then, should we greet an Awakened person? This question must also be considered to imply a total, ultimate problem in it, and not anything merely particular, such as having recourse to words or keeping silent.

If we are unable to answer the challenge of Śākyamuni on his deathbed, we cannot help but treat Dr. Suzuki merely as a man who was born and who died in an ordinary manner. Although his great achievements are too many to enumerate, a mere praising of them will not truly extol the man himself. I would rather say that unless we can extol him truly in terms of his Awakening, his achievements cannot be given their finishing touch and gain their true significance.

People with one accord, admire Dr. Suzuki, saying that he was not only an unprecedented national asset to Japan but a priceless treasure of the world. But this is not the end. For those of us who concern ourselves with an existential self-inquiry, with a thorough inquiry into the world and history, the problem of how to face Dr. Suzuki's *nirvāna* is a problem. Basically speaking, however, the

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[1] Cf. 禅宗頌古聯珠通集 C. *Ch'an-tsung-sung-ku-lien-chu-t'ung-chi*, J. *Zen-shū-ju-ko-ren-ju-tsū-shū*, Vol. II compiled by Fa-ying 法応 (J., Hō-ō), b. 1175, Sung dynasty; 禅宗正脈 C. *Ch'an-tsung-chêng-mo*, J. *Zen shū-shō-myaku*, Vol. I; 五燈会元 C. *Wu-têng-hui-yüan*, J. *Go-tō-e-gen*, Vol. I.

[2] 香厳智閑 J., Kyōgen-Chikan.

same can be said about any True-Man's death.

Here is another case in which the same problem was taken up by a Zen Master, Tao-wu Tsung-chih[1] by name, in the same ninth century China. Once Tao-wu, accompanied by his attendant, Chien-yüan Chung-hsing,[2] went to mourn the death of a person he had known. Chien-yüan, the attendant, rubbing the coffin in which the dead person had been placed, asked his master, "Is this one alive or dead?" In the ordinary sense, there was no doubt that the person was dead, but Chien-yüan was in quest of the solution of the life-death problem, and had to ask this seemingly nonsensical question. To this, Master Tao-wu immediately responded; "I won't say 'alive'; I won't say 'dead.'" This response indicates the same point as the above declaration of Śākyamuni. (Similar instances have often occurred in Zen since its earliest days.) Master Tao-wu, although asked the same question again and again, just kept on saying, "I won't say! I won't say!" Chien-yüan, when he heard his master's answer, is said to have realized what his master really meant. Now, what do you suppose he realized?

As to the way of encountering death, there is not only the apparently negative answer, "neither alive nor dead," but also seemingly affirmative ones. In the tenth century China there lived a Zen master named Ta-sui Fa-chen.[3] When asked, "How are you at the time when life-death arrives?" he answered promptly, "When served tea, I take tea; when served a meal, I eat the meal." I am afraid some people might take this to be beside the point. But, on the contrary, this hits the bull's eye.

In Zen there are many instances such as this; but we do not necessarily have to take them only from the past. We are directly confronting here and now the "arrival of the life-death" of Dr. Suzuki. Is then Dr. Suzuki alive or dead? How is the death of a person who has attained the Great Death, which is beyond life-and-death, to be taken? How is his life to be understood? How are we to respond to

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[1] 道吾宗智. J., Dōgo-Shūchi.
[2] 漸源仲興. J., Zengen-Chūkō.
[3] 大隋法真. J., Taizui-Hōshin.

this?

I have made my last *mondō* face to face with Daisetz-*koji* (Zen-layman). How have you taken it? For myself, I have thereby expressed my utmost reverence for and gratitude to the late Dr. Suzuki. This is none other than "Billions of *kalpas* apart; [yet] not a moment separated."

Who is this hurting *ONE*!?

If you want to see "ME" at my last,
First die a Great Death!
For "I" make no response to your calling;
"I" present no sight to your eye,
No sense to your touch,
No image to your conception.